

Press Release –

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Award Winning Trinidadian Trumpeter Etienne Charles to Perform at the Vermont Jazz Center on Saturday, September 21st, 2024 at 7:30 PM

Short Summary

Who: Etienne Charles and Creole Soul

Musicians:

Etienne Charles – trumpet and percussion

Godwin Louis - alto sax

Axel Tosca - piano

Alex Wintz – guitar

Alexander Tóth - bass

Harvel Nakundi - drum set

What: Calypso and rhythmically charged Caribbean jazz

When: Saturday, September 21st at 7:30 PM

Where: The Vermont Jazz Center, 72 Cotton Mill Hill, #222, Brattleboro, VT 05301

Tickets available: online at www.vtjazz.org, by email at sarah@vtjazz.org, or reservations by phone 802 254 9088.

Etienne Charles and Creole Soul to Perform at the Vermont Jazz Center on Saturday, September 21st, 2024 at 7:30 PM

The Vermont Jazz Center is excited to lift off its 2024-25 concert season on Saturday September 21st with the dynamic Trinidadian trumpeter, composer and percussionist, Etienne Charles.

Etienne Charles has traveled the world, seeking connections and differences between the rhythms and forms of Caribbean folkloric music. His band, Creole Soul, is his musical laboratory. Charles' search has led him to disparate regions throughout the Caribbean where he has reached out to local musicians, lived in their communities, eaten their food and created music with them. Charles' findings simultaneously illuminate musical connections between unexpected locales all while celebrating their cultural uniqueness. The results are a pleasure: fascinating arrangements and compelling melodies that take the listener to a rich, percussion-driven universe.

The ensemble that Charles is bringing to the Jazz Center reflects his multicultural approach – for this concert he will feature the acclaimed Cuban pianist Axel Tosca, three musicians of Haitian descent

(saxophonist Godwin Louis, drummer Harvel Nakundi, and Alexander L.J. Tóth on basses) and North American guitarist Alex Wintz.

Etienne Charles was born on the island of Trinidad in 1983. He holds a Master's degree from the Juilliard School, a Bachelor's degree from Florida State University, and is now an associate professor at Frost School of Music in Miami. He has been hailed by *JazzTimes* as “a daring improviser who delivers with heart wrenching lyricism.” According to *DownBeat* magazine, Etienne Charles improvises with “the elegance of a world-class ballet dancer.” He has been written into the US Congressional Record for his musical contributions to Trinidad & Tobago. In 2015, he received a Guggenheim fellowship. In 2016, he received a new works grant from Chamber Music America and was a featured panelist and performer at the White House Caribbean Heritage Month. He is also the recipient of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Millennial Swing Award. In 2022, Charles received a Creative Capital Award to pursue a multi-media project called “Earth Tones” that features sounds, stories, images and short films about musicians living in at-risk coastal communities affected by global warming.

Charles brings a careful study of myriad rhythms from the French, Spanish, English and Dutch speaking Caribbean to his own creative output. As a sideman he has performed and/or recorded with Monty Alexander, Roberta Flack, Frank Foster, Ralph MacDonald, Johnny Mandel, Wynton Marsalis, Marcus Roberts, Maria Schneider, the Count Basie Orchestra, Eric Reed, Lord Blakie and many others.

Each of Charles' successive records takes him deeper into understanding and communicating the experience, methods and structure of Caribbean music. He started to reveal his path in 2006 with *Culture Shock*, a recording which fuses Calypso and New Orleans vibes with a modern-jazz sensibility. His second album, *Folklore* (2009), tells stories from the point of view of traditional Trinidadian characters. This was followed by *Kaiso* in 2011. In the promo for that recording, Charles states: “Kaiso is an old West African word, and it comes from the form of encouragement you give to an artist while doing something: a fight or a dance or a song. Kaiso: it's what you would say when you enjoy something. It evolved over hundreds of years and it has become the reference [nick-name] for calypso [music].” That record is a tribute to the history of Calypso and its great performers like Mighty Sparrow, whose music, Charles believes, deserves to be listened to and honored. It is fascinating to know that Charles' family is also part of the Calypso tradition; his first professional experience in music was playing with his father and grandfather in their steel drum ensemble.

Charles' next album was 2013's *Creole Soul*, which Etienne describes as “a melting pot of ideas, colors, sounds, tones.” He thought about what it means to be Creole, and how that affected the people of the West Indies, New Orleans and other places where Creole families form the fabric of the community. He visited Haiti to gain insight into their creole experience and their use of Haitian Creole as the nation's official language. In the promo video for that disc, he reflected upon his journey: “In the world we live in today, it's impossible not to be a Creole, it's impossible not to have a blend of ideas, a blend of traditions, a blend of sounds that inspire or shape or determine who we are. There's a little bit of Creole in all of us. We all have a mix of feelings, of sounds of ideas and influences, a mix of doctrines. That's what makes the world an amazing place where we can all be together.”

In his 2016 release, the *San Jose Suite*, Charles chose three cities named San Jose and connected them via their music and culture. In his promo video, Charles' explained that he used the project to explore “the effects of colonialism in the New World...I did research on the African immigrants and the descendants of African immigrants” in three cities with the same name (San Jose) in California,

Trinidad and Costa Rica. “I’m writing music that speaks to history...I think that now it’s our job to have documents that in many different ways portray the history of the Americas as they pertain to ‘the New World.’ I think that the more ways that you have to tell a story, the more people will understand the story.”

Charles will be performing with a sextet including Godwin Louis on alto saxophone. Louis, who is of Haitian descent, is a student of world culture. He has performed in Haiti, Mali, Senegal, Togo, France, Spain, United Kingdom, Italy, China, Russia, Azerbaijan, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Venezuela, Colombia, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia and Australia. He is a graduate of the Berklee College of Music (where he now teaches), and the Thelonious Monk Institute. Louis has performed with Herbie Hancock, Clark Terry, Ron Carter, Al Foster, Jack DeJohnette, Jimmy Heath, Billy Preston, Patti Labelle, Toni Braxton, Babyface, Madonna, Gloria Estefan, Barry Harris, Howard Shore, David Baker, Mulatu Astatke, Mahmoud Ahmed, Wynton Marsalis, Terence Blanchard and many others. He has received numerous awards and released one album as a leader, and has appeared as a sideman on recordings with Terri Lyne Carrington, Victor Gould, Herlin Riley, Either Orchestra and many others.

The pianist of the ensemble is three-time Grammy-nominated Axel Tosca. Born in Cuba in 1983, Tosca grew up in a prestigious musical family. His mother is the renowned Cuban Trova singer Xiomara Laugart, and his father is Cuban folk singer-guitarist Alberto Tosca, who introduced him to guitar at age four. Tosca soon joined his parents on stage playing his first show at Casa de las Americas. One of his beloved piano teachers was Miriam Valdez, the daughter of Cuban piano legend Bebo Valdez and sister of Chucho Valdez. Tosca performs music from the classical repertoire, and is best known for his work in jazz and Latin traditions. Tosca has worked with the Roots, George Clinton, Steve Gadd, Lenny White, Pino Palladino, Giovanni Hidalgo, Godwin Louis, Robert Glasper, Carlos Alomar, J Balvin and Bad Bunny.

Grammy-nominated guitarist Alex Wintz is a frequent collaborator with Etienne Charles, Jeremy Pelt, Ben Williams and Roxy Coss. He has played at the Newport, Monterey, Montreux, and Montreal Jazz Festivals, among other major venues in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Wintz is currently on the faculty at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center Jazz for Teens, where he works in their school residency programs.

Bassist Alexander L. J. Tóth has been featured in *DownBeat*, *Jazziz*, *All About Jazz*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *NY Times* and the *Boston Globe*. His group, “MND FLO” received two Boston Music Award nominations for “Jazz Artist of the Year.” Tóth has performed at major festivals and venues, leading his own band and working as a sideman with luminaries like Wayne Shorter, Valerie Simpson, Marcus Miller, Patrice Rushen, Danilo Perez, Gregoire Maret, Donald Harrison, Antonio Sanchez, Sean Jones, Tia Fuller, Chris Potter, Ralph Peterson Jr, Terence Blanchard and Terri Lyne Carrington.

Drummer Harvel Nakundi was born in Miami. He was introduced to the drums at the age of 3 through local churches in Southern Florida. He has studied, performed, recorded and toured with Jennifer Lopez, Nicole Henry, Savion Glover, Kirk Whalum, Lewis Nash, Terence Blanchard, James Moody and many others at some of the top venues and festivals in Russia, Haiti, Japan, Brazil, Argentina, Italy, France, Martinique, and Australia.

Come learn the stories of Charles’ explorations and enjoy the band’s serious grooves at the Vermont Jazz Center on Saturday September 21st. Find out why *JazzTimes* critic Bill Milkowski has called Etienne Charles’ music “a fascinating, fully realized hybrid.” Calypso, funk, reggae and jazz music

will postpone the chilly, fall winds of Vermont. These joyful sounds will make you want to dance and feel like carnival really does exist.

This concert is sponsored thanks to Beth Raffeld and Philip Khoury, and Dave Ellis and Ann Greenawalt of Ellis Music. All performances at the VJC are subsidized by generous sponsorships to make ticket prices affordable.

Tickets for Etienne Charles and Creole Soul at the Vermont Jazz Center are \$25+ general admission and are available online at www.vtjazz.org or by email at sarah@vtjazz.org. Tickets can also be reserved by calling the Vermont Jazz Center ticket line, 802-254-9088, ext. 1. Handicapped access is available by calling the VJC at 802 254 9088.

Quotes:

If I could say that there was a thesis statement or something that ties it all together, my conclusion is basically this: Communities will continue to be formed no matter what happens with respect to colonialism...and when communities are formed and when they are strong, they can naturally resist adversity and bring changes to things that seem to be adverse. The other observation was that culture is the main identity of a society, the art is the main identity of a society. Where I'm from in Trinidad-Tobago, nobody thinks about oil. People think about calypso and steel pans, the food. When you think about the United States you don't think about Silicon Valley, you think about rock and roll, jazz and blues. And as a result of that, it reminded me of the importance of teaching because the only way that a culture can survive through generations is through the art of "passing it on."

Etienne Charles in a speech at Michigan State University, June 21, 2017

Charles has managed to bring to life a very vivid sense of the mystery, the magical realism — the luminous folklore of the Caribbean.
Jazzwise Magazine

VIDEOS

Video from Michigan State:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7ABDb7LxUo>

Video from Jazz Standard with band including Cuatro player

<https://www.facebook.com/etiennejazz/videos/704682253214312/>

Video from Carnival Band

<https://www.facebook.com/etiennejazz/videos/10156034146272920/>

Promo for Carnival (audio interview)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5QTW1MWwek>

San Jose Research

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4YGMzy4G8k>

Promo for Kaiso

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDVOA3kgua4>

Promo for Folklore

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOyCxVITJR0>

Promo video for Creole Soul

<http://www.jeffcenter.org/etiennecharles>
